



University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
**Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative  
Exchange**

---

University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects

University of Tennessee Honors Program

---

5-2016

# Kanye West: The Brand

Alexander Wade

Student, [awade20@vols.utk.edu](mailto:awade20@vols.utk.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_chanhonoproj](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj)



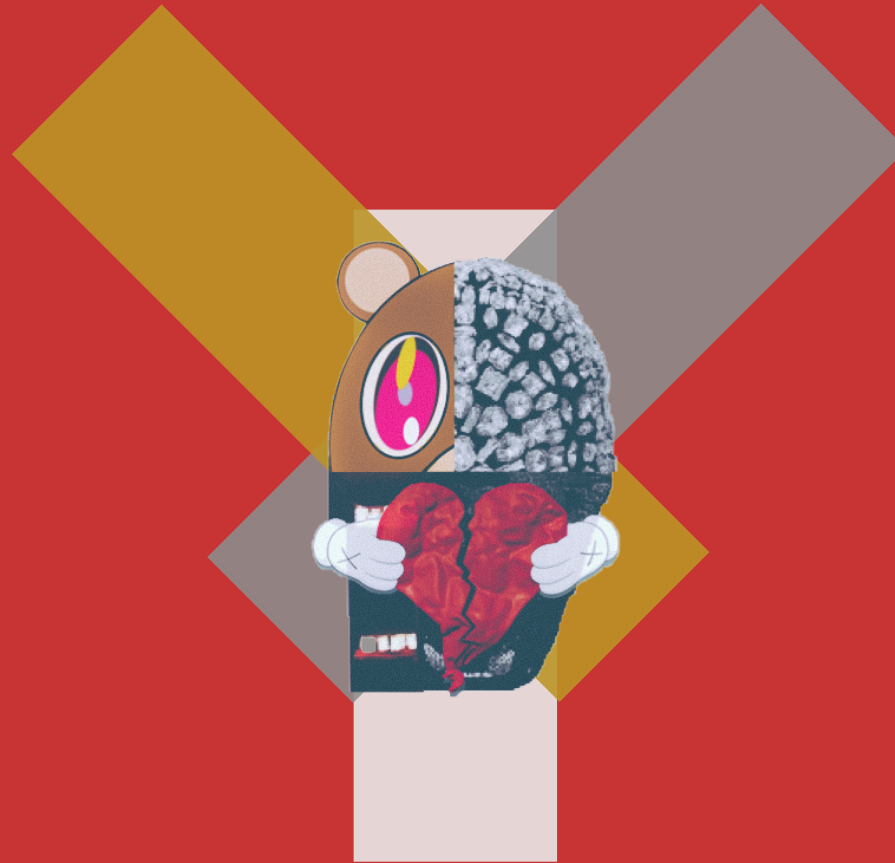
Part of the [Advertising and Promotion Management Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Wade, Alexander, "Kanye West: The Brand" (2016). *University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects*.  
[https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_chanhonoproj/1924](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/1924)

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Tennessee Honors Program at Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [trace@utk.edu](mailto:trace@utk.edu).



# KANYE WEST: THE BRAND

ALEXANDER WADE  
CHANCELOTOR'S HONORS THESIS  
FACULTY ADVISOR: DR. COURTNEY CHILDERS

## ABSTRACT

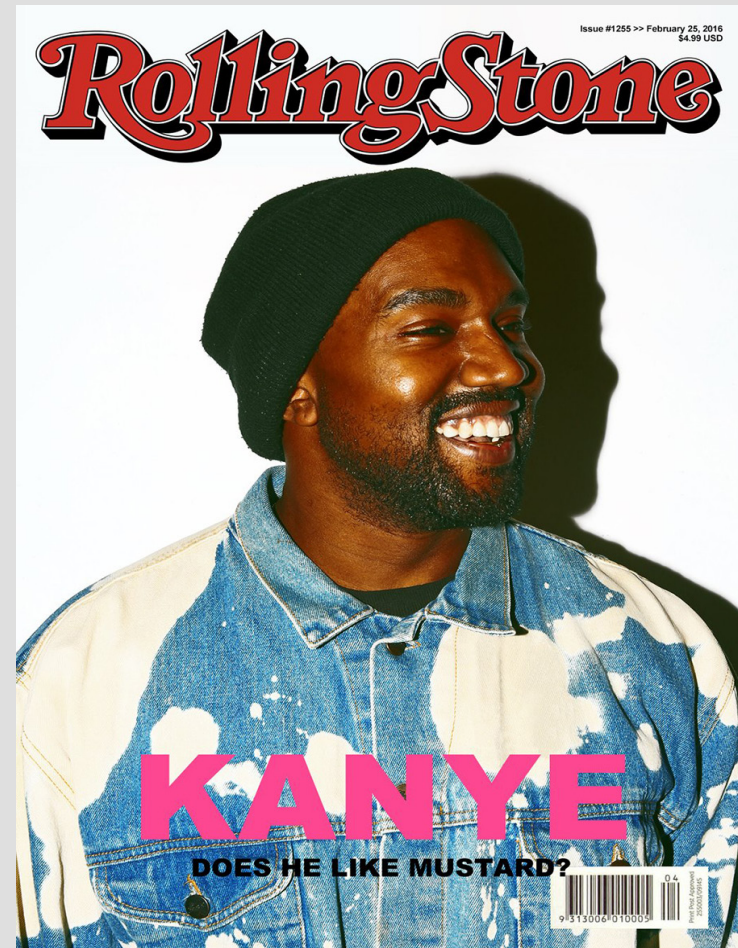
Hip-hop artist and creative genius Kanye West is inarguably one of the most infamous people in the public sphere today. Kanye Omari West was born in Atlanta on June 8, 1977, but moved to the infamous south side of Chicago with his mom when he was three after his parents got divorced. But how did Kanye become the man he is today? How did he reach a status where every one of his tweets can become a news story, his face is projected on the side of buildings across the US, and he claimed the most liked Instagram post in history?

Kanye's celebrity status, as well as marrying into social media royalty, helped him overcome the natural obstacles to a large social media following. It was his enduring need to be innovative and break the mold that has lead to several state-of-the-art promotions that have separated him from the traditional advertising and promotional efforts that musicians typically resort to. Kanye's endeavors have transitioned from simply music to performance art, clothing and fashion, a record label, and an entire creative agency named after his late mother DONDA. With the addition of each facet under Kanye's brand comes unique advertising and promotional efforts. Kanye's album releases are events, a date on the calendar for many, and this is done solely through carefully calculated movements and him just being himself.

Throughout this thesis, the background to the formation of the Kanye brand and Kanye's unique advertising and

promotional efforts throughout the years as well as a highlight of the recent release of his new album *The Life of Pablo* and clothing line Yeezy Season 3 will be illustrated. Using secondary research, Hootsuite monitoring, and Salesforce social listening software, a detailed analysis of how Kanye is able to reach so many people, whether they want him to or not will be revealed.

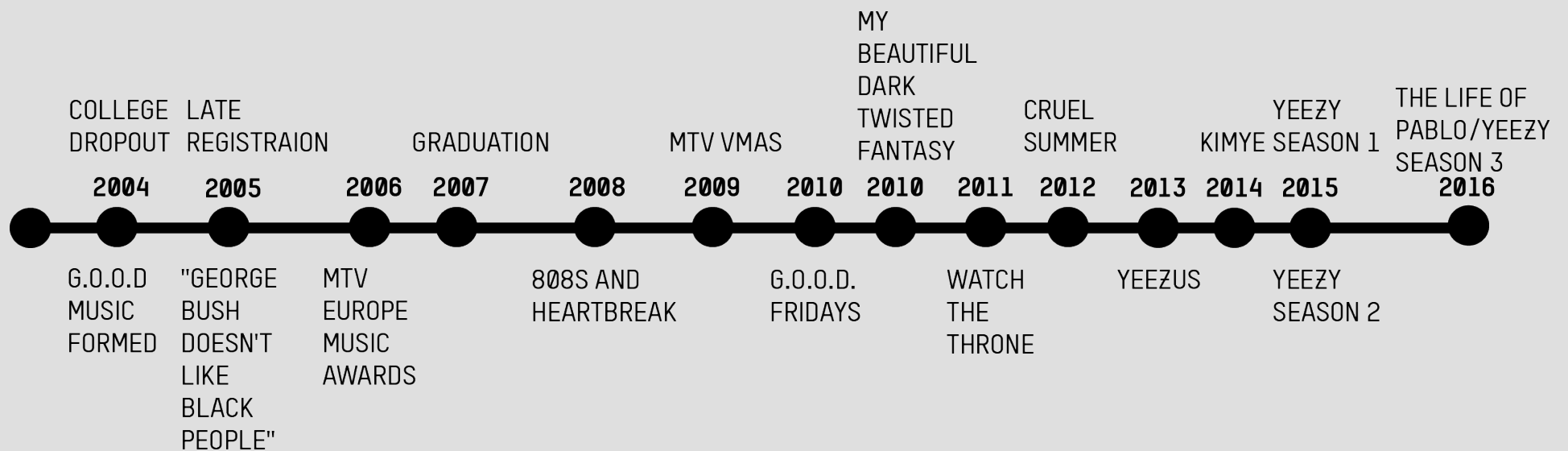
*Photo from Tyler, the Creator*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1: BUILDING THE BRAND..... 4

PART 2: BUILDING OFF THE BRAND..... 13



## PART 1: BUILDING THE KANYE BRAND

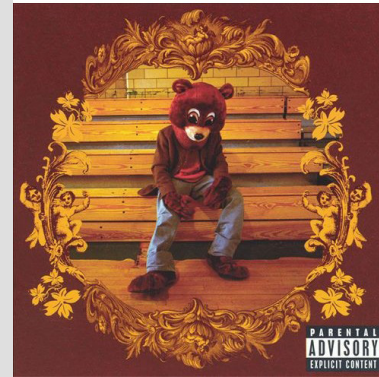
A brand is a “characteristic or distinctive kind” and Kanye West is both a character and distinctive <sup>1</sup>. The answer to what makes Kanye so influential is Kanye. Something as simple as a tweet is an advertisement and a statement of the Kanye brand that he has created over the years. This does not mean that he is no longer human and a walking advertisement, but his creativity and brash attitude have made him into his own personal brand that he can promote from.

In order to understand how Kanye got the voice he has now and can simply tweet and go viral, it is important to look at the creation of his brand and public image, whether intentionally or unintentionally created. The self-proclaimed “international a\*\*hole” makes himself heard. By creating such a distinctive brand and persona, Kanye is able to take a minimalist approach in advertising and promoting his albums through social media the stronger his brand gets.

*Kanye's Brand Development through Yeezus*  
Image by Degausser



## COLLEGE DROPOUT (2004)



Having burst into the music scene by starting to produce songs for Jay Z and Roc-A-Fella records in the early 2000's, Kanye wasn't satisfied and began to make his own music. The result is the *College Dropout*, hailed by many as one of the best debuts of all time and winning the Best Rap

Album Grammy <sup>6</sup>. Promotions wise, *College Dropout* received the typical radio station tours, posters plastered on walls, and a cosign from industry great and head of his record label Roc-A-Fella Jay Z. While these promotions are nothing extraordinary, they managed for him to debut at second place on the Billboard charts and to sell over 441,000 copies in his first week <sup>6</sup>. The thought that went into the cover art, eventually would begin to

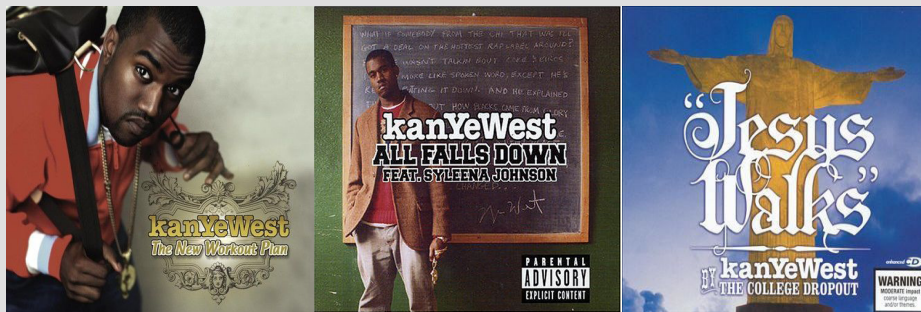
create the Kanye brand and his separation from the style and look of the popular gangster rap at the time. The “Dropout Bear” as it became known is posted on the bleachers in order to incorporate the most notable aspect of a school with that of its ironic mascot <sup>4</sup>. The Dropout Bear was to college what Kanye was to the rap and music



*The Dropout Bear 2004*



genre, a personal endeavoring being that had dreams bigger than the expectations of society, and because of this left to sit alone on the bleachers. With albums, the release of singles and getting radio play is key to getting sales and promoting the upcoming album. In the CD booklet, Kanye created a yearbook including real high school photos of the features and people that worked on the album <sup>4</sup>. By establishing this theme, Kanye created a cohesive brand for the album that would also supplement his own personal brand as the lone innovator. The advertising efforts were not special, but the album marks the beginning of the Kanye West brand that eventually becomes the majority of his promotion.



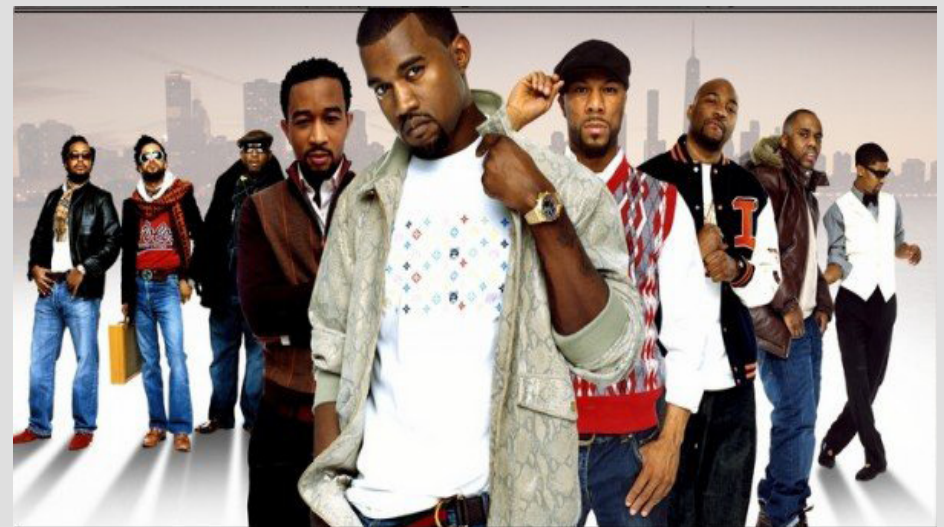
*The Singles' Artwork for College Dropout 2004*

## G.O.O.D MUSIC LABEL (2004)



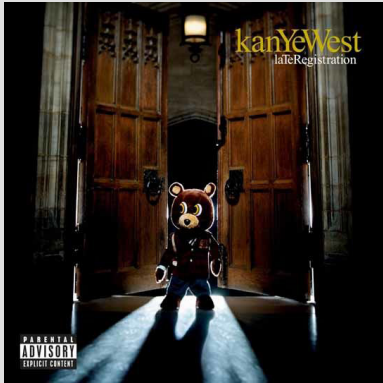
Following his success from his debut album, Kanye began his own record label G.O.O.D. Music or Getting Out Our Dreams. From its first signing John Legend, the label has garnered legends of the industry such as Pusha T, now president of the label, and grown artists like Big Sean to

international stars. The label has become “synonymous with innovation and achievement” and become an integral part of the Kanye brand <sup>7</sup>. Kanye has remained relevant through the years both musically and visually by surrounding himself with the right people at the right time and through their influence and perspective he is able to create. Kanye is also no stranger to self-promotion, so much so that he may even be the poster boy for it and his G.O.O.D. Music Label only added to his self-branding. The cherub seen in the logo is eerily similar to the one from the *College Dropout* cover art and is an incremental piece in building the Kanye brand to its “godly” status of today <sup>4</sup>.



*G.O.O.D Music Label Members 2004*

## LATE REGISTRATION (2005)



If his debut wasn't proof enough of his talent, Kanye's second album cemented his talent. Gaining another Best Rap Album Grammy and going platinum again, Kanye was doing something right. Unlike traditional branding through an advertising campaign, the Kanye brand was growing with

the release of each of his albums. The Dropout bear sees a return in the cover of *Late Registration*. The Dropout Bear has been shrunk to the size of a child, "standing in between gigantic wooden doors, emphasizing that the rejuvenation of the genre would be a huge responsibility <sup>4</sup>." Kanye tells a story about his perspective of the challenge he faced in the CD booklet this time going on an adventure through a university, sitting in empty classrooms, reading books, and then leaving as seen on the cover <sup>4</sup>. Kanye studied the greats of rap and now that he had a foundation to grow from, he was ready to change an entire genre. The album cover also was influenced by the works of American satirical painter, John Currin, one of Kanye's favorite artists, and furthering his brand's separation from the traditional rapper <sup>4</sup>. *Late Registration* saw the same promotional and advertising efforts that *College Dropout* did, but there are distinct differences. Not only did Kanye develop his own brand through each album release, but also a unique brand and story for each album. With this in mind,

the single covers and promotional materials once again took a theme. Kanye became known for his incorporation of soul samples into his music after his sophomore album, and the promotional materials followed suit.



*The Singles' Artwork for Late Registration 2005*

## GEORGE BUSH DOESNT LIKE BLACK PEOPLE (2005)

Hurricane Katrina was a nightmare for everyone, and it also provided Kanye West with his first political and controversial remark on a major platform.

Kanye has and always will be Kanye and his outbursts are simply his way of expressing his feelings and mind, whether appropriately timed or not. Politics aside, Kanye's comment brought him into the spotlight for an entire



audience, all that don't listen to rap, that he hadn't made an impression on before. While Kanye's remarks may not



be considered a promotion or advertisement they did help mold his brand and provide a first impression for a majority of America. No news is bad news and Kanye became an American bad boy instantaneously and marked the beginning of his transformation of more than just a musician. Nothing causes more publicity than a controversial remark on a major platform and the beginning of Kanye saying that “people want me to be the voice of the people in a way, but I’m really the voice of myself. Like I really just say what I feel <sup>3</sup>.” With his belief that people wanted him to be the spokesperson for the people, Kanye now had created a brand image for almost all of America, but it wasn’t quite fully formed at this point.

### MTV EUROPE MUSIC AWARDS (2006)

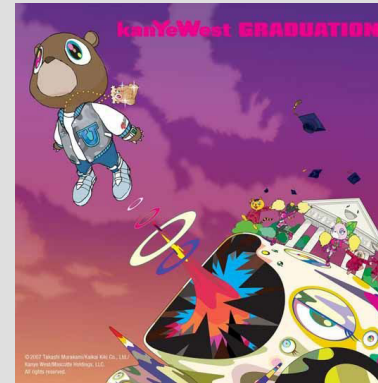
Similar to his Hurricane Katrina outburst, Kanye stormed the stage at the MTV Europe Music Awards in Copenhagen, feeling that he had been robbed of the Best Video Award by Justice vs. Simian. His remarks were ridden with profanity and marked another major platform tirade that furthered his American bad boy image, only this time it was on an international stage <sup>6</sup>.



*Kanye Interrupting Justice's Acceptance Speech at MTV Europe Music Awards 2006 (MTV)*

“Anybody that would try to make me out to be so crazy and so this and so that. Thank you, you’re just adding to the excitement, you’re giving me stuff to write about <sup>3</sup>.”

### GRADUATION (2007)



*Graduation* is Kanye's third album and marks a major landmark in his career. Not only did it mark the final chapter in the Dropout Bear brand image, but also his innovation in promotions and advertising. On the *Graduation* album cover, the Dropout Bear is shown flying out from “Universe City” a conceptual metropolis designed by the “Japanese Andy Warhol” Takashi Murakami <sup>4</sup>. “The album booklet tells the story of Dropout Bear struggling to make his college graduation ceremony on time after being awoken by his alarm clock, hopping in a DeLorean that dies, trying to catch a cab, and walking (after being chased by a rainstorm) to his ceremony. He then gets shot back into the sky, which is depicted on the back cover <sup>4</sup>.” The Dropout Bear brand image painted Kanye as the star trying to fit into society, but not able to and eventually going off on his own path. *Graduation* also featured Kanye's biggest single to date, “Stronger,” and several other songs that were given the music video treatment. The branding of *Graduation* specifically was that of a futuristic, neon light filled Tokyo. Outside of the



traditional radio tours, music videos, and posters, Kanye and 50 Cent issued a challenge to each other over who would sell more albums, seeing as they were releasing their albums on the same day <sup>6</sup>. 50 Cent went so far as to say that he would not release another solo album if Kanye outsold him. Kanye sold 957,000 copies compared to 50 Cent's 691,000 <sup>6</sup>. The competition was incredible publicity for both of them with large magazines and newspapers picking it up and bringing both of them into the general public spotlight rather than simply the rap enthusiasts. By beating 50 Cent in the competition, Kanye established himself as one of the greats of hip-hop and made people recognize him whether they wanted to or not.



*The Singles' Artwork for Graduation 2007*

*808's and Heartbreak Inside Cover*



## 808S AND HEARTBREAK (2008)



With *Graduation* Kanye not only went double platinum, but also reached the highest point he could in both pop and rap. This meant creatively he was open to altering everything. *808's and Heartbreak* is both a groundbreaking album for Kanye and for music in general.

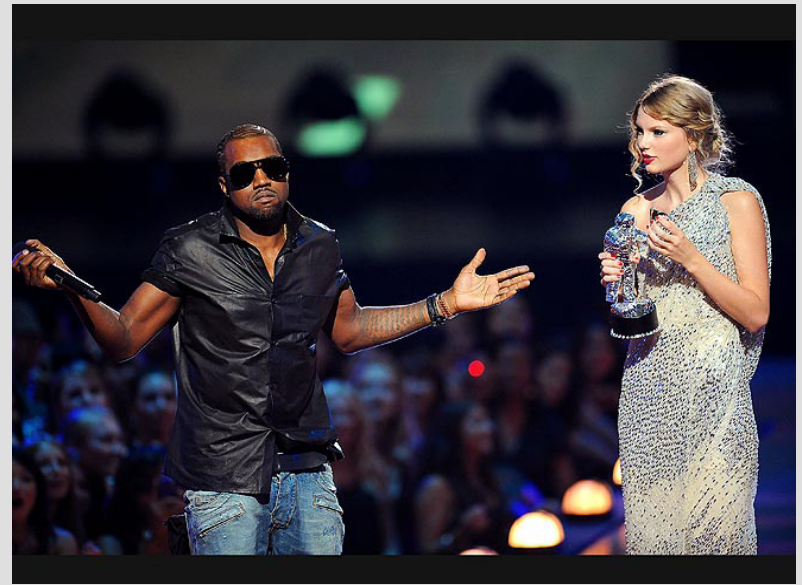
Heavily inspired by the death of this mother and break up with fiancé Alexis Phifer, Kanye also changed his personal brand. On *808's and Heartbreak* Kanye became the distraught grey suit wearing man that had no where to turn other than music <sup>4</sup>. The album cover is branded with a series of broken in half hearts made out of deflated balloons, with "Heartless" being the only one without the heart symbol <sup>4</sup>. The colors on the side of the cover are very similar to the vibrant colors of the *Graduation* cover and seemed to try and tie his previous brand image together with his new one <sup>4</sup>. Kanye wore a similar heart-shaped pin in the promotional images for the album and in the album booklet. *808's and Heartbreak* stood as the transition of the Kanye brand from a graduate of the hip-hop community into a more human symbol, almost entirely emotion and eventually growing to be more.



*The Singles' Artwork for 808's and Heartbreak 2008*

## MTV VMAS (2009)

The most notorious of all of Kanye's public outbursts, cemented Kanye as the unfiltered and immature artist that doesn't care about social standards. Kanye's VMAs outburst went viral immediately over social media and has inspired memes to this day and the phrase "I'mma let you finish" has become a running joke. Racism also flooded social media platforms after the event, with people regarding it simply as a black male going up against a white female <sup>11</sup>. The social media reaction was fuming and the strongest responses were from Kanye's music peers with names like Kelley Rowland and Ricky Martin furious at Kanye calling him tacky and an asshole. Many big names like Ryan Seacrest and John Mayer were quick to console Taylor on Twitter, painting her as America's sweetheart <sup>12</sup>. While his remarks and actions were not well liked to say the least, it was the biggest publicity stunt Kanye has ever had and made everyone look at him, even if in disgust.

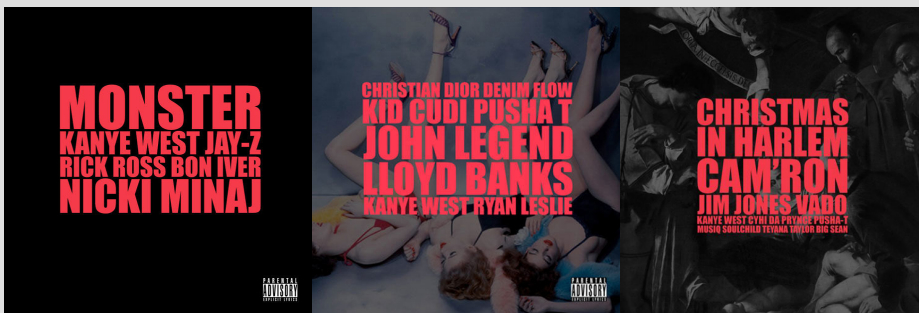


*Kanye Interrupting Taylor Swift's VMA Acceptance Speech 2009 (MTV)*

While many simply saw Kanye's stunts as immaturity, Dave Bry a former XXL/Complex editor saw something else in them. "I end up thinking that looking back on it, all this stuff starts to seem more like a performance art piece ... and I think this was one of the most revolutionary things about his art that a lot of people don't talk about enough is that I think that he was really intentionally made a decision that "I'm going to be really really outward in public and be very very loud and brash and say whatever's on my mind and disrupt things and if I'm in a cranky mood at an award show, I'm going to throw a tantrum at an awards show." And then he calls himself the international asshole. He's like I'm aware of this and he wasn't really yelling anything that he didn't really feel. Like, I always believed it with him, if anything I believed it because look this guys letting himself be an asshole in front of all these cameras, it must be real <sup>3</sup>." **-DAVE BRY**

## G.O.O.D. FRIDAYS (2010)

While people may have hated Kanye West, they still listened to his music. In a PR effort to regain his public standing after interrupting Taylor Swift at the VMAs, Kanye began the G.O.O.D. Friday series. Releasing a new single every Friday for months, Kanye filled the internet with major feature-filled songs. From Justin Bieber to his entire G.O.O.D. Music Label, every week the sore in the public's mind from the VMAs began to heal a little bit more. The artwork for the singles was very minimal, with those that aren't blacked out featuring dimmed paintings from the Italian Renaissance and half-nude models in near darkness under a large Impact typeface<sup>4</sup>. Not only did Kanye rebuild some of his public image with this series, but he also set a precedent that has been copied by other artists like Swizz Beatz's Monster Mondays and more recently A\$AP Rocky's Wavy Wednesdays<sup>4</sup>.



*The Singles' Artwork for G.O.O.D Fridays 2010*

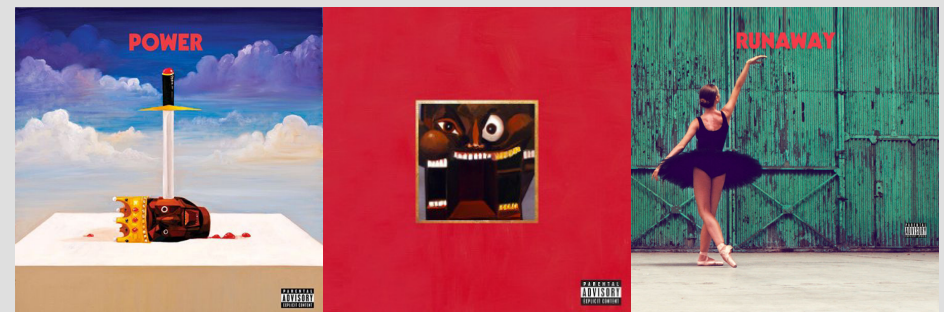
## MY BEAUTIFUL DARK TWISTED FANTASY (2010)



Building off the energy and buzz from the G.O.O.D. Fridays, Kanye released his self-proclaimed masterpiece. After months of renting out an entire Hawaiian recording studio and flying in people to work in all three booths simultaneously, Kanye released the album that is the definition for

his current brand image. Kanye graduated from simple rap on *808's and Heartbreak* and now considered himself a king. Like only a king would, Kanye commissioned legendary artist George Condo to create several paintings for the album<sup>4</sup>. The single artwork for the lead single "Power" shows a beheaded crowned Kanye with a sword sticking out of his head, portraying Kanye as the king that has had the people rise up and overthrow him<sup>4</sup>. The album cover, that was censored by almost every retailer, is a Kanye-esque man being intimate with a winged demon. This was seemingly creating an image of Kanye dancing with the devil and enjoying it. The

*The Singles' Artwork for My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy 2010*



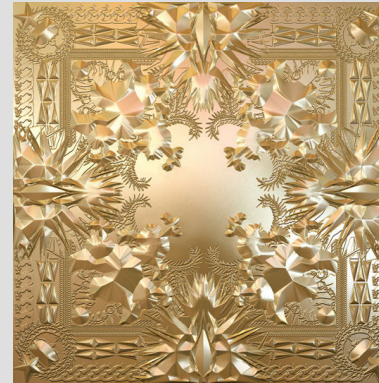


imagery of Kanye as a king or any other leader that rules through divine right and therefore chosen by the gods, illustrated the next big step in Kanye's brand development, a heavenly character. *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* was not only unique in a branding aspect, but also a huge step for Kanye creatively. Ordinary music videos would not do for his masterpiece and grand opus, Kanye made an entire short film playing through the album and telling the story of him entertaining a fallen angel. Kanye's new rap king powers were shown to full effect throughout his promotion efforts and in the short film, summoning an entire ballet company to perform with the playing of a piano.

*Scenes from Kanye's Runaway Short Film*



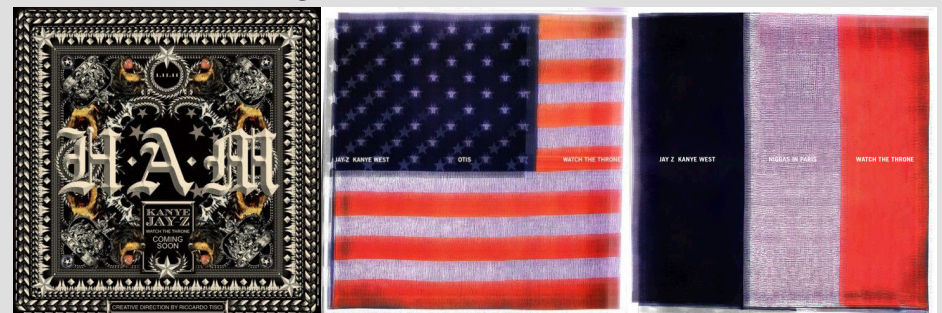
## WATCH THE THRONE (2011)



Once you have the throne, you must keep it and Kanye and Jay Z's heavy hitting and braggadocios filled collaborative album let everyone know they had no intentions of letting it go any time soon. Jay Z was where Kanye began his career and in order to evolve his brand to the "Yeezus"

levels it's at today, he did an entire album with his mentor and best friend as a statement that they were now on the same legendary level. Everything about the album oozed money and power. From the Otis Redding sample for the single "Otis" where Jay Z and Kanye drift in a chopped Maybach to Kanye wearing a kilt similar to that of the Egyptian pharaohs, the entire project was that of kings of the industry<sup>4</sup>. The album cover is gold and metallic looking, designed by Givenchy

*The Singles' Artwork Watch The Throne 2011*



creative director Tisci, further creating a kingly status of the album<sup>4</sup>. The tour was also a huge success, with the two



of them deciding in the middle to perform their hit single “N\*\*\*\*\* in Paris” one more time than the previous show until they reached over 10 times in one concert. Every time they played it more, music blogs wrote about it. They also released a 10-minute documentary of the making of the album to further the buzz of the album and tour.



Complex Magazine Cover  
Featuring G.O.O.D Music 2012

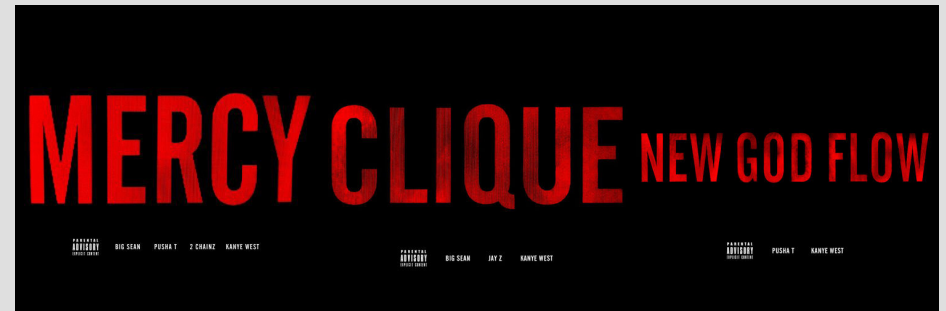
## CRUEL SUMMER (2012)



Now that Kanye had achieved royal status individually, it was time to do the same for his label. *Cruel Summer* is Kanye's attempt to showcase the immense reserves of talent that he had been cultivating. The album was Kanye and his creative prowess entirely with the art direction

coming from his own personal creative agency DONDA<sup>4</sup>. The design of the album is similar to that of *Watch the Throne*

in that it has a royalty feel to it. The single artwork used a similar style to those of the G.O.O.D. Fridays but with red LED lettering on black backgrounds. *Cruel Summer* was a show of power by Kanye in his attempt to take over the world of music. Unlike his previous two projects, Kanye did not do a short film or documentary for *Cruel Summer*, but the single “Mercy” received the video treatment in the form of the entire label running around a parking garage.



The Singles' Artwork for Cruel Summer 2012

## YEEZUS (2013)



In regards to promotions and advertising, *Yeezus* is where Kanye truly shined. Returning from his social media hiatus in 2012, Kanye tweeted “Simplicity” which was deleted with all the other tweets before then<sup>4</sup>. The entire album is minimalist from the album cover, or lack there of, to the sounds of the album. Kanye did not release a single for the album, instead he traveled around

the United States projecting his face on the sides of buildings, rapping the song “New Slaves”<sup>4</sup>. The events were attended by hundreds of people and stand as one-of-a-kind, some cities even banned them for the use of profane language. Kanye also released a series of posters with the album cover that stated “Please Add Graffiti,” plastered on the New York subways and encouraging fan participation in creating their own cover<sup>5</sup>. Kanye’s camp also created an *American Psycho* inspired ad where a sociopath New York business man talks about the intricacies of Kanye’s greatest works before killing the unlucky



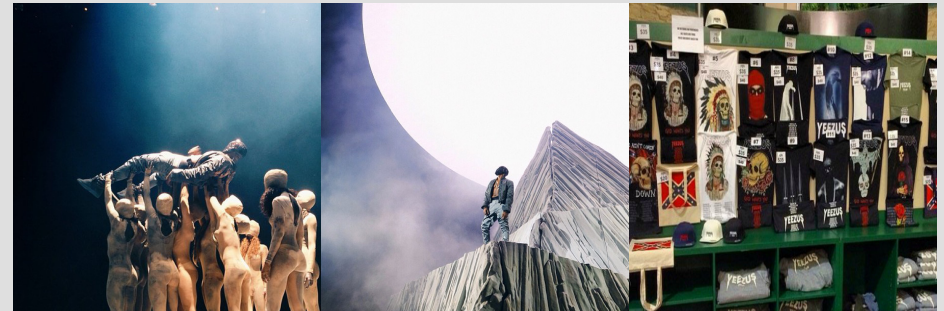
*“New Slaves” Projection On Building 2013*  
Photo by Will Deitz



*Yeezus Please Add Graffiti*  
Posters 2013 (yeezygraffiti.com)

and bewildered business man in his audience. *Yeezus* also stood as the pinnacle of the Kanye brand as he had transcended being a mortal king and taken to the hip-hop heavens and become Yeezus. Kanye does not go as far as saying he’s the God, but he does refer to himself as a god in the aptly named song “I am a god.” The *Yeezus* tour also played a huge role in Kanye’s brand with him performing on a 50-foot volcano, incorporating 12

female dancer “disciples,” and wearing different Margiela masks covering his entire face for the majority of the show<sup>10</sup>. The tour was also riddled with Kanye’s rants about topics from politics to “classism” that all went viral on social media and on blogs. At this point, Kanye realized that the more he talked and made a scene the more people would talk about him. The merchandise for the *Yeezus* tour was also controversial and created a buzz with the use of the grim reaper, rebel flag, and Native Americans<sup>10</sup>.



*Images from the Yeezus Tour 2013*

## PART 2: BUILDING OFF THE KANYE BRAND

At this point, Kanye had established the American bad boy brand and because of it, he was also one of America’s most hated and well known artists. Whether he was intentionally acting out or simply expressing himself without any thing resembling a filter, he had created and cemented the Kanye brand in the minds of the world, allowing him to promote his new projects with something as simple as a Tweet. When people love to hate you and you give them weapons to strike out at you, they will, and for Kanye these are in the form of his Tweets.



## KIMYE (2014)



*The Most Liked Photo on Instagram in History at the Time 2014*

On May 24, 2014 Kanye and Kim Kardashian were married. The event was nothing short of a spectacle, seeing as the Kardashians are social media masters and Kanye had created a Twitter persona only he could. If one thought that they were impressive on social media alone, together is an entirely different story. Reaching over 60 million people with their followings on Twitter combined, they are a force to be reckoned with on the social platform. The sealing kiss photo of the two was the most liked Instagram picture in history for an entire year, and was finally surpassed by none other than relative Kendall Jenner<sup>13</sup>. The marriage of the two celebrities, combined with the birth of their daughter North West, distracted the world from Kanye's antics for a while and it almost seemed that he was done with his public blow-ups and free expression.

## YEEZY SEASON 1 (2015)

Like everything with Kanye up to this point, it just wasn't enough. Kanye needed a new form of artistic expression and spent three years studying fashion and creating his first clothing line. While Kanye had worked with Nike for years, creating several editions of his Nike Air Yeezys before parting ways with them over creative control issues, he had now partnered with Adidas that had promised him and DONDA creative control. Debuting at the New York Fashion Week in 2015, Kanye's Yeezy Season 1 was his introduction into the fashion world and his first expression under the Adidas name. New York Fashion Week is a huge publicity event by itself,



*Yeezy Season 1 2015 (Highsnobiety.com)*

now the outspoken no punch holding rapper had decided he was part of the fashion industry. If people didn't like Kanye before, now was their chance to say so about something that the fans of his music couldn't argue his prior artistry and

accomplishments and people were quick to denounce the clothing line on social media.



*Yeezy Season 1 Adidas' Tweet 2015*

To produce just a little more hype over his first clothing line, Kanye debuted “Wolves” a new song what was supposed to be the first song on his upcoming album <sup>14</sup>. Kanye knew that convincing normal people to check out his clothing line would be difficult, especially with the exorbitant prices, but by releasing a single at his show all of the fans of his music would see his line while listening to the song. While the line was overall accepted by the fashion industry, the populous was resolute that Kanye should simply stick to music. The backlash on social media was immediate. People referred to Kanye’s clothing line as looking similar to something a homeless person would wear, but just like every other time

Kanye had faced extreme opposition up until this point, it only pushed him to prove everyone wrong <sup>14</sup>.

## VMA VIDEO VANGUARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Clothing, music, and directing would be more than enough for most people, but not Kanye. Unlike the other times though, Kanye had an inspirational acceptance speech of the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award that was presented to him by none other than Taylor Swift <sup>15</sup>. While the two were “friends” now, MTV knew what it was doing having the two of them on stage together to create a buzz around the show. Kanye created even more buzz though when during his acceptance speech, he announced he would run for president in 2020 <sup>15</sup>. Whether he was serious or not, everyone was looking at Kanye again.

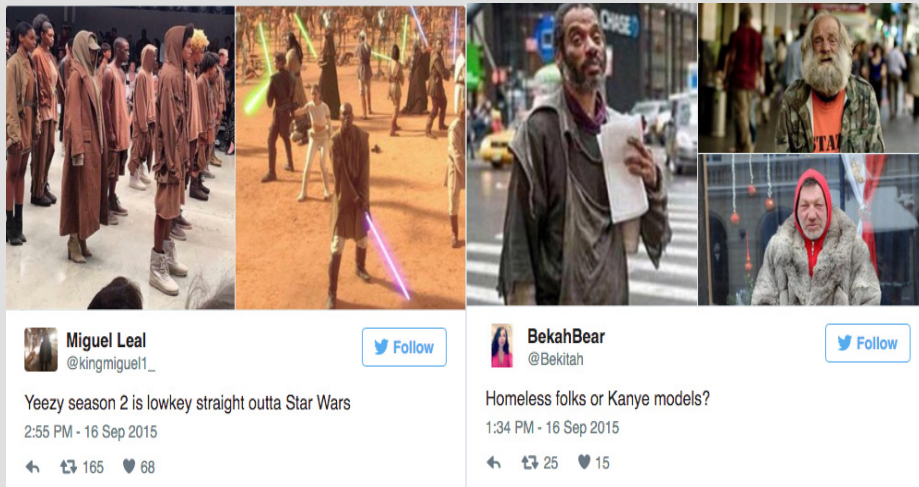


*Taylor Swift Presenting Kanye the VMA Video Vanguard Award 2015 (MTV)*



## YEEZY SEASON 2 (2015)

Not only did Kanye complete another clothing line in the same year, he also live streamed the entire show to theaters across the country, that people bought tickets to see <sup>16</sup>. Again, Kanye's second clothing line was debuted at New York Fashion Week and was the talk of the event. A Complex writer that was covering the event noted the buzz that made it feel like an event within an event <sup>16</sup>. Kanye faced the same criticism as his last clothing line, but even more this time. While both lines were loosely based on military clothing styles, Yeezy Season 2 had more brown and longer cloak-like clothes, instantly creating comparisons to Star Wars and Jedi outfits <sup>16</sup>. While people were not necessarily talking positively about Kanye's clothing lines, they were talking about them.



*Public's Reaction to Yeezy Season 2 2015*

## THE EVER CHANGING ALBUM (2016)

### SO HELP ME GOD



*So Help Me God Album Announcement 2015*

This release was after he announced he was working in the studio with none other than Sir Paul McCartney, leading to the release of the singles "Only One," a dedication to his daughter North and "Four Five Seconds" featuring Rihanna and Paul McCartney that they all performed at the Grammy Awards. Kanye went on to perform "All Day" at the Brit Awards accompanied by a large mob of friends and two flamethrowers. The important aspect to note is that Kanye was no longer doing any paid promotion. He simply announced new music on Twitter and the internet did the rest for him.

The first title emerged alongside his first single, "All Day," since "Wolves" was debuted at Yeezy Season 1, instantly creating buzz among fans and especially on Twitter since Kanye had started making all of his announcements exclusively through the social platform.

## SWISH



### *Swish Album Announcement 2016*

*SWISH* was the longest lasting of the names and reached the stage in the album release where Kanye started tweeting pictures of track lists for the album. Kanye's goal for this project was to provide an inside view of his creative and editing process while simultaneously creating several trending Tweets. In order to do this Kanye started tweeting pictures of the track lists of his album as it was updated and other artists contributed or simply were in the studio. The names that started appearing on autograph ridden were not small names either, furthering the buzz about the album every time a new name was added. As the album progressed, so did the track list as well as the name.

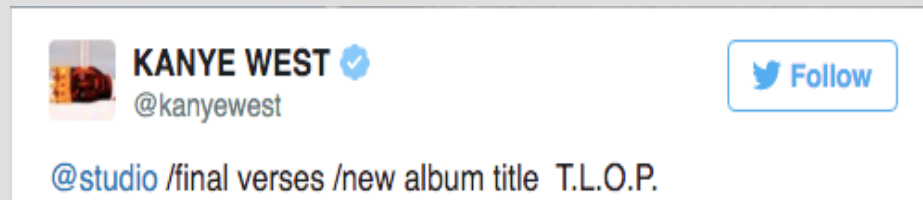
## WAVES

### *Waves Album Announcement 2016*

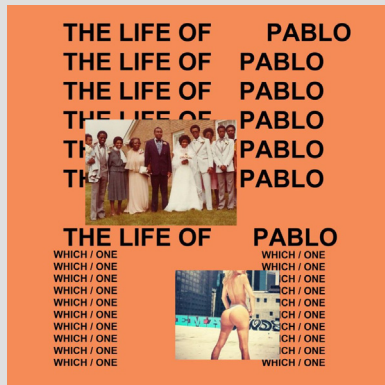


The third title and the shortest lasting. G.O.O.D. Music member and frequent collaborator Hudson Mohawke tweeted that he was responsible for the most recent name change and with the name change came more track list tweets. Even bigger was the Twitter rant that Kanye went on about rapper Wiz Khalifa after he misunderstood one of Khalifa's Tweets, thinking it was about his wife. Kanye's name started trending quickly there after and blog posts and news articles even were published about the rant and how Kanye had blown up for no reason<sup>17</sup>. The important thing was that *Waves* was getting unpaid press from the whole charade and Kanye even acknowledged that during his rant<sup>17</sup>. Kanye's ex and the mother to Khalifa's child Amber Rose also weighed in on the argument, making comments about Kanye's sexual habits, but also furthering the press<sup>17</sup>. The next day Kanye apologized to Khalifa and just as quickly as it started the fight ended<sup>17</sup>. If Kanye's Twitter campaign and rants to promote his album wasn't enough, he received help from his friend Andre 3000 who did a celebrity Uber ride to the studio with Kanye to watch the process of finishing the album<sup>18</sup>. Building off the buzz from his Twitter rant and posting updates to the stage and clothes from his upcoming Yeezy Season 3 release, Kanye decided to once again change the name of his album.

## THE LIFE OF PABLO



*The Life of Pablo Album Announcement 2016*



Tweeting that *Waves* was a temporary title and that it might change before the album was released, Kanye seemed to more indecisive than ever. To try and help him decide as well as reach his wife's nearly 42 million Twitter followers, Kim Kardashian posted a poll for people to choose the

name of Kanye's new album. While the first title *So Help Me God* won handedly, Kanye later tweeted a couple of days before the release that the album's title was T.L.O.P, and that anyone that guessed it before the release would receive a free pair of Yeezy Boosts. To say this created buzz online is an understatement. Kanye's name and the album title abbreviation were both trending on Twitter, his name had already been for a solid week, but now they were also on Facebook where he hadn't even posted anything nor has an account. This buzz followed into the Yeezy Season 3 event where he was no longer releasing his line at New York Fashion Week. Instead he rented out Madison Square Garden, selling tickets to the show, paying people \$80 to be

extras on the stage during the show, as well as streaming the event internationally to movie theaters and Tidal. The most important aspect out of all of this was that the only promotion Kanye did for the event was through Twitter and it was all unpaid. Not only did he not spend a dollar to promote the album and had 20 thousand people in attendance, but also over 20 million people attempted to stream the event at its peak <sup>19</sup>. The only reason Kanye was able to achieve such high attendance was because of his creation and molding of his brand. The album and event were at the same time an evolution of his brand that had remained relatively still since Yeezus and an homage to his past, influences from every one of his albums could be seen on different songs. Before the album was released, Kanye tweeted describing the album as a "Gospel album with a whole lot of cursing." Where did the now Yeezus have left to evolve his brand? Well, in the form of gospel and worshiping the god like a religion. Not only did he describe it as a gospel album, but Kanye also later explained the meaning of the name Pablo to end the discussion of the album's namesake that he had started by releasing a second album cover saying, "Which/One." Pablo stands for the Apostle Paul that was "The most powerful messenger of the first century ... because he was a traveler ... He was a learned man not of the original sect so he was able to take the message to the rest of the world ... He was saved from persecution due to his Roman citizenship ... I have the right to speak my voice."





## YEEZY SEASON 3

Kanye seemed to hear the commentary after Yeezy Season 2 and while maintaining a similar color wheel, the styles were different enough while remaining true to their predecessors. Kanye promoted the clothing line by posting pictures of some of the items on his Twitter and Kim also tag teamed the effort posting pictures of her wearing some of the items. The pictures emerging before the event were of a tarp moving, but obscuring everything<sup>20</sup>. When the tarp was finally removed, several raised

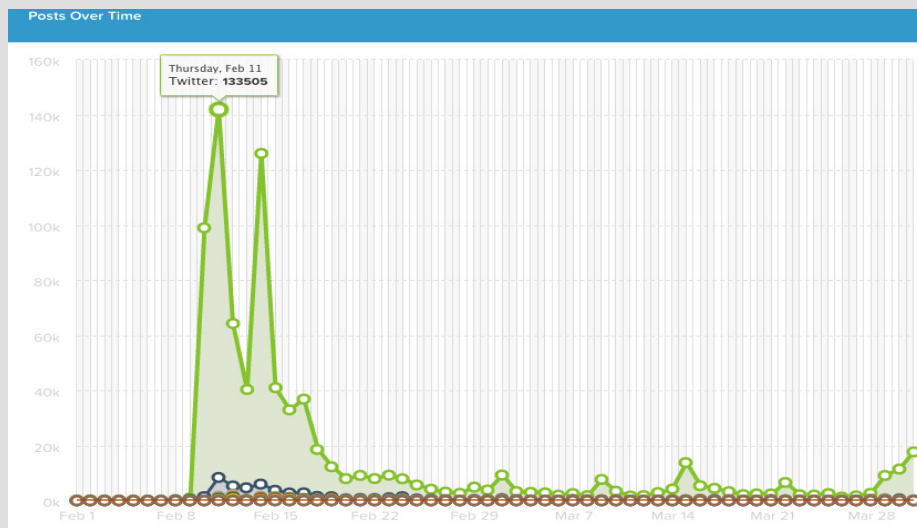


platforms were surrounded by a sea of extras that Kanye had hired for the event<sup>20</sup>. On top of the platforms, the models remained straight faced and for the most part still, with the few exceptions being fellow rapper Young Thug coming down to hang with Kanye around the laptop and British model Naomi Campbell emerging to show off a black coat<sup>20</sup>. These two names were not publicized until seeing the event and only furthered the buzz around the event.

## SALESFORCE SOCIAL STUDIO

In order to track the impact the Yeezy Season 3 Event and the release of the *Life of Pablo* would have on Kanye's brand, Social Studio was used to monitor the sentiment. Social Studio is a software that analyzes posts from over 1 billion sources using key words that correlate to either positive or negative comments. By tracking these key words, Social Studio is able to predict a general positive or negative feeling towards the chosen topic. The sentiment regarding Kanye himself, streaming services because the album was Tidal exclusive initially, and the new album *The Life of Pablo* were tracked. After about a month of the album being exclusive to Tidal, Kanye released the *The Life of Pablo* on all streaming services. The same key words at this time were tracked and compared to the Madison Square Garden event to see how Kanye's unique release strategy impacted the overall sentiment.



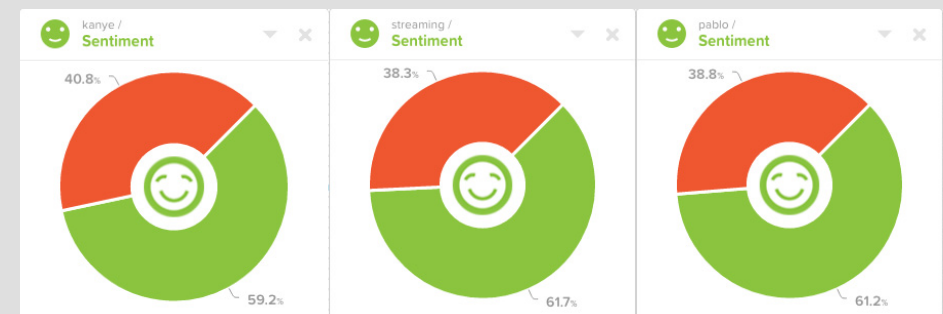


Post Volume 1/1/16 - 3/29/16

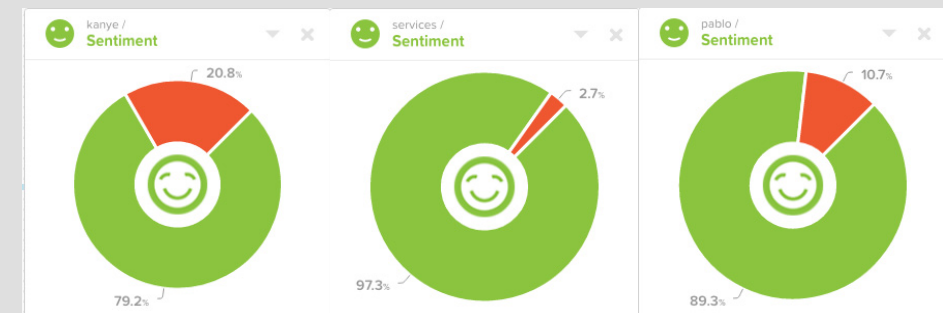
While there were a lot of posts in general about Kanye and his new album, the sheer amount of Tweets surrounding Kanye the day of his Madison Square Garden event shot up exponentially, reaching over 133,000. There was an extreme drop off of activity the following days after the event because Kanye had not released the album to the public yet, but when he finally did the Twitter volume shot back up to over 120,000. This graph illustrates Kanye's power on Twitter and in hindsight, him experimenting with the release of his album and building buzz around it. Kanye would later go on another Twitter rant about how *The Life of Pablo* would be exclusive to Tidal forever and how he supported the streaming service because they had supported him and his various creative efforts. This rant would go on to see Tidal's subscription rate double and *The Life of Pablo* to be streamed over 250 Million times in the first ten days of its release on Tidal, but

this wouldn't be the end for Kanye. Kanye claimed that the album was not finished and that he still had to finalize it. He would go on to update the album twice over the first month after its release until he reached what he believed to be the finished product. Despite there being such a buzz around the album, the positive sentiment regarding both Kanye and *The Life of Pablo* wasn't exactly what one might call overwhelming. For some, hearing that 60% of people viewed both Kanye and his new album positively on the day of the Madison Square Garden event might be bewildering, but what is more bewildering is the extreme increase in positive sentiment after Kanye went back on his word and released the album on all streaming services.

### MADISON SQUARE GARDEN EVENT (FEB. 11, 2016)



### RELEASED ON ALL SERVICES (APRIL 1, 2016)



Kanye's announcement that *The Life of Pablo* was coming to all services not only meant more sales of his album, but also saw a significant increase in positive sentiment for both him and the album. Almost 80% viewed Kanye positively and nearly 90% saw *The Life of Pablo* in a positive light. With Kanye's initial success on Tidal and the large increase in positive sentiment, his new album is almost getting a second debut for those that don't subscribe to Tidal, which is still the majority. The success and genius behind this release strategy will surely be revealed in the next several weeks.

## AFTER EFFECTS

After three years of starting his fashion career, several release dates, as well as names, Kanye finally released the album that began as *So Help Me God* and finally settled on *The Life of Pablo* several days before the release of the album. Kanye sees *The Life of Pablo* as a piece of "contemporary art", "living breathing changing creative expression," and true to his word he has not yet released the final album <sup>21</sup>. After a month of the album as well as the live stream of the Yeezy Season 3/ Album Release Show being exclusively released on Tidal, Kanye finally finished the album that took him over three years to release.

Once again, Kanye live streamed his fashion show across the world to movie theaters, but this time he built off his previous experience with his fashion line releases and played what was thought at the time to be the entirety of his new album.

The power of Kanye's brand was shown in full force as his exclusive album release and promotion of Tidal on Twitter saw the struggling streaming service more than double its subscription rate. To top off all of Kanye's efforts and Twitter rants, *Time* listed him as one of the 30 most influential people on social media, and it's not hard to see why <sup>22</sup>.

There were several other Twitter tirades from Kanye including a tweet proclaiming Bill Cosby innocent and another proclaiming him to be \$53 million in the red and begging big Silicon Valley executives for money to fund his creative fantasies, including Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg. These Tweets went on to become news stories and people debating on why he would say such things or even whether or not they were true.

After 21 pages of Kanye, one sentence will suffice. Whether people like Kanye or not, no matter their age, race, or gender, they at least know what is happening in his life. No other artist has created such a buzz using only social media and more specifically only Twitter and that is the power of the brand that he has created through all of his albums and outbursts over the years. Kanye's power stems from disrupting the social norms that everyone obeys, especially large corporate brands. Kanye's stream of conscience style without a filter has been adopted by another one of America's most hated yet also most prominent people, Donald Trump. Attempts at trying to tear both Kanye and Donald Trump down lead to their fans only further standing their ground

and bringing their names into the headlines even more. Whether you love him or you hate him, Kanye is one-of-a-kind and so is his brand.



## Sources

- 1□ "Brand." *Merriam-Webster*. Feb. 28, 2016.
- 2□ Kanye West. Twitter.
- 3□ Ortiz, Armani and Dan Buyanovsky. "Dissertation: A KanYe West Story." Feb. 10, 2016.
- 4□ Pasori, Cedar and Leighton Mcdonald. "The Design Evolution of Kanye West's Album Artwork." *Complex Magazine*. June 17, 2013. Feb. 28, 2016.
- 5□ Pasori, Cedar. "Kanye West and DONDA Put up Yeezus "Please Add Graffiti" Posters on the Streets of NYC." *Complex Magazine*. June 10, 2013. Feb. 28, 2016.
- 6□ Wang, Julia. "Kanye West: Biography." *People Magazine*. Feb. 28, 2016.
- 7□ Chesna, Benjamin. "The Complete History of G.O.O.D. Music." *Complex Magazine*. Sep. 26, 2012. Feb. 26, 2016.
- 8□ Jenkins, Craig. "Kanye West's Perfect Imperfections My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy at Five." Nov. 20, 2015. Feb 28. 2016.
- 9□ Vena, Jocelyn. "Katy Perry, Pink, Hayley Williams Bash Kanye West's VMA Rant." *MTV*. Sep. 14, 2009. Feb. 28, 2016.
- 10□ Ortiz, Edwin. "10 First Impressions from Opening Night of the "Yeezus" Tour." *Complex Magazine*. Oct. 20, 2013. Feb. 28. 2016.
- 11□ Sclafani, Tony. "Reaction to Kanye was Swift – and Overblown." *Today Show*. Sep. 18, 2009. Feb. 28, 2016.
- 12□ "More Stars Tweet About Kanye's Slam Against Taylor

- Swift At VMAs." *Radar Online*. Sep. 14, 2009. Feb. 28, 2016.
- 13□Waxman, Olivia B. "Here Are the Five Most Popular Instagram Photos of All Time." *Time*. Oct. 6, 2015. March 10, 2016.
- 14□Babcock, Gregory. "The Internet Thinks Kanye West's Pricey Yeezy Season 1 Clothes Are Perfect for the Zombie Apocalypse." *Complex Magazine*. Sep. 10, 2015. March 10, 2016.
- 15□Kaufman, Gil. "Here's the Full Transcript of Kanye's Incredible VMA Vanguard Speech." *MTV*. Aug. 31, 2015.
- 16□Babcock, Gregory. "Here's Everything the Internet Thinks Kanye West's Yeezy Season 2 Looks Like." *Complex Magazine*. Sep. 16, 2015. March 10, 2016.
- 17□Platon, Adelle. "Kanye West Targets Wiz Khalifa in Massive Twitter Rant." *Billboard*. Jan. 27, 2016. March 20, 2016.
- 18□Reiff, Corbin. "This Story About André 3000 Taking a Random Fan to the 'Waves' Session Last Night Is Incredible." *Complex Magazine*. Jan. 30, 2016. March 12, 2016.
- 19□Cox, Jamieson. "20 Million People Watched Kanye West's Yeezy Season 3 Live Stream." *The Verge*. Feb. 11, 2016. March 12, 2016.
- 20□Duboff, Josh. "Inside Yeezy Season 3: Kanye West, the Kardashians, and Thousands of Their Closest Friends." *Vanity Fair*. Feb. 11, 2016. March 12, 2016.
- 21□Greene, Jayson. "Kanye West Is Still Changing *The Life of Pablo*. Does It Matter?" *Pitchfork*. March 16, 2016. March 16, 2016.
- 22□"The 30 Most Influential People on the Internet." *Time*. March 16, 2016. March 16, 2016.
- 23□Salesforce Social Studio
- 24□Hot New Hip Hop Images
- 25□Harper's Bazaar
- 26□Yeezus tour photos from left to right thisismax.net, Drew Millard at Noisey, Givenchydonc from Instagram
- 27□Young Thug Yeezy Season 3 photo Dimitrios Kambouris. Naomi Campbell from Harper's Bazaar/Getty Images
- 28□George Bush Hate's Black People photo from USA Today